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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 NAPLES 000052

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 4/22/2019
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SUBJECT: REACHING OUT TO CALABRIA

REF: A. 08 Naples 96, B. 08 Naples 36, C. 08 Naples 38

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CLASSIFIED BY: J. Patick Truhn, Consul General, AmConGen Naples.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (C) Summary: During an early April trip through Italy's most problematic region, Calabria, Consul General Truhn and ConGen Naples staff reached out to both government officials and the public to reiterate our common interest in development and rule of law. In a region in which politicians are weak and exercise only limited control, outreach through NGOs, social groups and the media is essential. A courageous anti-Mafia prosecutor in Reggio Calabria, Nicola Gratteri, was extremely critical of the GOI's underfunding and mismanagement of the judicial system; most prosecutor positions in Calabria go unfilled, and anti-Mafia investigators lack sufficient resources to travel in their districts. Much of Gratteri's work centers on narcotics trafficking, the most lucrative business for the 'Ndrangheta crime syndicate. By all accounts, Europe's busiest transshipment port, Gioia Tauro, is controlled by the 'Ndrangheta, which earns commissions on all containers and has power over hiring. Italian customs officials have been threatened (one even being shot at); CG Truhn requested of the Prefect additional security for USG (Container Security Initiative) personnel at the port. The anti-Mafia NGO "AmmazzateciTutti" continues to grow. Our visit culminated with a major conference, organized by post, on promoting tourism in southern Italy; an improvement in this sector could be one way to drive development in Calabria and the rest of the impoverished South. Although the problems in Calabria may seem intractable, people like Gratteri and our AmmazzateciTutti contacts inspire hope that honest people can make a difference. End summary.

Anti-Mafia Prosecutor "Not Afraid to Die"

12. (C) Nicola Gratteri, an anti-Mafia prosecutor in Reggio Calabria and author of "Blood Brothers," a book about the 'Ndrangheta crime syndicate, does not pull punches. In a frank exchange, he was highly critical of counterparts in other EU states, the Italian judicial system (including the Justice Ministry and the Judicial Branch Council), and even his own colleagues. Gratteri complained that EU criminal laws and procedures are not harmonized; for instance, electronic eavesdropping is not considered evidence in Germany, and search warrants cannot be served at night in Spain. He also expressed frustration over alleged "rampant corruption" among Spanish officials. Gratteri stated his disappointment with an Italian judicial system that leaves large numbers of magistrate

positions unfilled in Calabria and other "hardship" regions. He pointed out that in each of the districts of Locri and Palmi (characterized by a major 'Ndrangheta presence), only three of nine prosecutor positions are currently filled. Gratteri himself has turned down positions in more attractive cities, preferring to remain in Calabria and fight the good fight. He admitted that Judicial Branch incentives (such as danger pay) to serve in Mafia strongholds are inadequate. He also railed against politicians who have continually failed to provide sufficient funding for magistrates to do their jobs; as such, they are overworked and frequently unable to travel for their investigations. Gratteri asserted that what makes him effective is that he has realized he is not afraid to die. He disparaged colleagues who did all they could to avoid hardship assignments, and others who had abused telephone wiretaps to such an extent that the Parliament had recently restricted their use.

13. (C) Turning to the 'Ndrangheta, undoubtedly the largest organized crime syndicate in Western Europe (ref B), Gratteri noted that his investigations have led to the captures of 180 of its members. He is currently overseeing 80 ongoing investigations of the group. Gratteri praised the cooperation his office has with Embassy Rome's FBI, DOJ and DEA Attaches. The narcotics trade is the 'Ndrangheta's most lucrative business, and the syndicate has members and affiliates operating in places like Spain, Germany, The Netherlands, Canada and Colombia to facilitate that trade. A large amount of incoming cocaine transits West African countries, where, Gratteri noted, Italy has no bilateral cooperation agreements or diplomatic presence. As many other 'Ndrangheta observers have noted, Gratteri confirmed that its members, once arrested, almost never reveal information, and that this family-based loyalty limits the tools of law enforcement to technology (i.e., electronic surveillance and eavesdropping). 'Ndrangheta clans operate with collusion and support of the local population, Gratteri explained. In the absence of the state, the Mafia is the only alternative for services, employment and protection. Keeping a low profile and resolving internal disputes peacefully have been successful strategies, Gratteri told us; the August 2007 assassination of six mafiosi at a pizzeria in Duisburg, Germany,

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was an error the organization would not like to repeat, he said.

14. (C) Gratteri's team is conducting an investigation into 'Ndrangheta involvement in Gioia Tauro, Europe's busiest transshipment port located on southern Calabria's Tyrrhenian coast. Gratteri stated that the mob practically runs both the legal and illegal activities of the port, earning a commission on every container and controlling the hiring of personnel ("including even the guy who operates the access gate"). However, Gratteri dismissed the common media portrayal of the port as Europe's main gateway for narcotics, noting that the 'Ndrangheta traffics drugs through every port in Italy and several other European ports.

Prefect Working to Gain Control Over Public Works Contracts

15. (C) The Prefect of Reggio Calabria, Francesco Antonio Musolino, told us he was working to safeguard enormous amounts of EU and GOI funds earmarked for Calabria. The 'Ndrangheta clans are trying to get their hands on some six billion euros in EU structural funds, as well as 4.5 billion euros budgeted by the GOI still available to finish the ongoing (twenty years!) construction of the Salerno-Reggio highway, 1.4 billion for the first stages of the Sicilian Strait Bridge and one billion for the construction of a regasification facility at Gioia Tauro. The Prefecture is developing a strategy for more effective control of public contracts in order to lock the mob out of construction projects. One of Musolino's ideas is to require contractors to specify daily what persons and vehicles will be present at every worksite the next day, and for Prefecture inspectors to conduct spot checks enforce compliance. The CG noted our concerns for the security of AmCit DHS (Container Security Initiative - CSI) personnel working at Gioia Tauro;

Musolino confessed he was unaware of their presence, and undertook to be helpful in any way he could. (Note: Italian Customs personnel at the port have received serious threats in recent months, with one even being shot at while driving. So far USG personnel have not been threatened or attacked, but have taken a heightened security posture in light of these incidents. End note.)

CSI Ops Going Well Despite Security Concerns

¶6. (C) During a visit to the CSI office at Gioia Tauro, CSI personnel reiterated that they experience outstanding cooperation with port, customs and Treasury Police officials. No WMD components have been detected in any of the cargo checked at the facility. The CSI personnel related numerous first- and second-hand accounts of corruption at the port and 'Ndrangheta intimidation of both Italians and foreigners in the local communities. For USG personnel at Gioia Tauro, a concern related to the Mafia presence is the substandard health care available in the area; according to Prosecutor Gratteri, physician and nursing degrees can be bought, and (in his words) there are few doctors in Calabria qualified to practice medicine. The hospital in Vibo Valentia, where most CSI personnel live, attracted extensive press attention last year after two easily preventable deaths, due in one instance to the lack of a back-up power system. (Note: ConGen Naples remains in frequent contact with CSI personnel stationed in both Naples and Gioia Tauro, and has urged them to keep us apprised of any security or other concerns. End note.)

Anti-Mafia NGO Continues to Grow

¶7. (C) In the town of Polistena, the spokesman for the anti-Mafia NGO "AmmazzateciTutti" ("Kill Us All" - see ref C), Aldo Pecora, told us the group continues to grow. It will shortly open a new headquarters in the town of Nicotera, and has strengthened its contacts with other anti-Mafia groups around the country, such as Sicily's "AddioPizzo" and Campania's "Students Against the Camorra." AmmazzateciTutti has had some problems finding local organizers, though; Pecora noted that its representative in one city in the region of Apulia is a fifteen-year-old girl. The group is planning public commemorations of the murders of two anti-Mafia magistrates in August (the CG will attend one). Pecora himself has matured considerably since we last met him, and at age 23, is completing a book about the 'Ndrangheta and plans to take the national exam to become a magistrate. Like Gratteri, he told us he, too, is no longer afraid to die.

ConGen Outreach Program

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¶8. (U) Our three-and-a-half-day trip through Calabria included three separate speeches on U.S. foreign policy by the CG to some 500 Rotary Club members in Reggio, Catanzaro and Vibo Valentia. These addresses followed two speeches to university and Rotary groups in Cosenza the week before. In addition, the PAO and PA staff met with rectors and professors at the universities in Reggio Calabria and Catanzaro, to learn more about their academic exchanges with U.S. universities and identify possible projects for the future. PA also met with representatives of various media outlets in both cities, including with a new on-line paper based in Reggio Calabria, www.strill.it. The PAO gave interviews to the Gazzetta del Sud in Reggio, and to a local television station in Catanzaro. Post's outreach program culminated in a major conference on April 2 in Vibo Valentia, hosted by ConGen Naples, on strategies for promoting tourism in southern Italy. The CG gave an introductory speech stressing the need for a regional touristic identity, infrastructure development and improved customer service. Other participants included the President of the Vibo Valentia Chamber of Commerce, who challenged the Calabria regional government to fill the

long-standing leadership gap in tourism promotion; Massimo Loquenzi, the Italian representative of the U.S. Travel Association, who described his experience successfully promoting Philadelphia; Harry Charles Mills Scio, Development Consultant for Marriott, who explained expectations of American hotel brands (rarely represented in southern Italy); Senator Giovanni Mauro, who urged southern regions to make better use of available project financing to further economic development; as well as a cultural archaeologist, the President of Italia Turismo, and the Regional Commissioner for Tourism. The CG also gave a number of press and media interviews on the margins. This outreach activity dramatically increased the number of USG interlocutors in a region in which we have traditionally had little influence. We even gained a warden for the consular section's warden system.

19. (C) Comment: It is difficult to visit Calabria and not come away pessimistic. As noted in ref A, if it were not part of Italy, Calabria would be a failed state. The question posed in ref A, "Can Calabria be saved?" remains a valid one. With the 'Ndrangheta so firmly entrenched and the state so noticeably absent, it is difficult to imagine a region in Western Europe with more intractable problems. Prosecutor Gratteri believes that, "As long as the human race exists, the 'Ndrangheta will exist." Yet it is people like Gratteri, Pecora, and others -- brave, honest and on the front lines of the fight against this scourge -- who offer a glimmer of hope for the future. ConGen Naples will continue to engage Calabrians on the key issues of development, rule of law and organized crime; our new surge of interlocutors are clearly encouraged by our interest. The goal of changing attitudes is an uphill climb with a very steep slope, but the cost of ignoring Calabria means the region will continue to be an economic and social weight dragging down a key ally of the United States.

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